

OCHICHI NCHIGBU AND SIT-TIGHTISM IN CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA: A PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in post-colonial Africa has been saddled with lots of predicaments ranging from dictatorships, resentments, bad governance, banditry, kidnapping, extraordinary rendition, arrogance, bribery, apathetic corruption, abuse of office and fundamental human rights etc. African democracy in comparison with the West has experienced an unimaginable stay in power by her leaders. This is deeply worrisome. The frequency at which they hold grip to power has been a critical point of debate among scholars in Philosophy, comparative politics, diplomacy, and other fields of Humanities. Many scholars have wrestled, while many are still wrestling on ‘how and why’ many Africa dictators have continued to hold grip to power unceremoniously, against the wishes and aspirations of the people. There have been honest yearnings of people for leaders who can rise to the challenges of the time, leaders who can swim against the current, leaders of repute, leaders who can create the lasting change on Africa soil. To put this paper in proper perspective, this researcher examined the concept of *Ochichi Nchigbu* (dictatorship), and Sit-tightism as it affects contemporary leadership experience in Africa. Really, a sad fact for Africa and Africans!

Keywords: Leadership, *Ochichi Nchigbu*, Sit-tightism, decolonization, dictatorship.

INTRODUCTION

Africa has about fifty four (54) independent states. Most of these states have similar political and socioeconomic conditions, owing to the striking similarity in geography, history, politics, and religion among them. A notable centripetal force among African states is the fact of having a similar experience of imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and a relative evenness in the division into two sphere of religious influence—Christianity and Islam, the two being three world faiths of the Abrahamic category.

The remarkable homogeneity in the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of African states is responsible for the tendency to lump up the continent whenever there is an attempt to classify, characterize or assess these states, based on academic, research, economic and other strategic concerns.

Why do African states display a marked similarity in their socioeconomic and political features, based on different indices or measures of characterization? This simply points to the fact that African states are beset with similar problems, as a result of which they respond uniformly to whatever variable that is administered across the region, and thus cause these countries to occupy similar positions in different ranking methodologies, like those of the world Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United nations Development Programme, United Nations Economic and Social Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and so on.

Despite the relative homogeneity of African states, three major socioeconomic and politico-cultural clusters could be seen in the continent. First, a perceptible line runs through the middle

part of Western and Central Africa, cutting the continent into two fairly equal zones of socio-cultural influence. The northern zone is predominantly Islamic by faith and Arabic by culture. All the countries of North Africa, and one half of West African countries, including one half of central African states, fall within this zone. On the other hand, from the southern zone of West and central African states down to the southern tip of the continent, Christianity is predominantly practiced.

Second, African states have a common history of imperialism and colonialism, most of which occurred in the not-so-distant past. Though some European states like Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Italy have either brief or insignificant colonial presence in Africa, it will not be wrong to assert that Africa was almost evenly partitioned between two European states—Britain and France.

Third, most African States are characterized by a low level of material advancement, low capital formation, lack of effective skills for industrialization, and other features that describe the condition of underdevelopment. With the possible exception of the southern end of the continent, driven by the Republic of South Africa, and the northern end of the continents which enjoy the benefits of proximity and economic association with the countries of the Middle East, most part of Africa is poor, and suffering from a host of socioeconomic and political ills.

The above analysis is a perfect representation of the political economy of African states, which provides a fertile ground on which most of the political and socioeconomic trends germinate. One of these trends or political tendencies which are common to many African states, is the tendency among executives or heads of African states to cling to power for a long time, even throughout their lifetime. Since African states have been shown to possess common socioeconomic variables, it is the intention of this research to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the concept of political *Ochichi Nchigbu* (dictatorship) and sit-tightism by exploring a diverse range of issues and perspectives which feed into the phenomenon.

OCHICHI NCHIGBU: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In simplified terms, a dictator is someone who has an absolute control of power over a people, or a state. Oftentimes, this power is obtained through unconventional or forceful means. Over the years, the question as to ‘why and how’ African dictators continue to have a stronghold to political power against the will of the ruled has been recurring in a consistent consistency. The egregious and infamous 42-year presidency of Gaddafi (1969-2011) was a succinct example in the midst of many.

Kawalay-Tendo (2020) submits:

Modern dictators have survived by surrounding themselves with elite groups that are composed mainly of allies that were involved in the initial struggle for power. Insulating oneself with the cadre of ‘yes men’ is one part as the other is keeping up with their rents. These rents can present themselves mostly in the forms of ill-acquired wealth and influential government positions. Comrades of a dictator have a lot to lose if their valued leader is overthrown. Consequently, they will go out of their way to ensure that the statuesque remains.

They do these effectively by circulating their voices, and championing the incumbent’s plan of action oftentimes through dissolution of political parties and removal of term limits. The

contemporary Africa witnessed years of political domination, and untold dictatorships during the 70s, 80s and even 90s. During these periods, Africa was a hotbed for civil wars, and acute political domination by a generation of strongmen, who held plum political positions at the center. The ruled endured poor health facilities, poor government dividends, apathetic corruption, bribery and deteriorating infrastructures. Any opposition or revolution from the people leads to brutal force using the state structures such as the police or army. There was an unimaginable *Ochichi Nchigbu* (dictatorship), emanating from the political class.

THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL SIT-TIGHTISM

Starting from the days of monarchy to the present, the objectification of leadership or rulership with the 'seat,' the object for sitting down, has become a common practice. Seat has thus become a perfect metonymy for political leadership, and its various forms like stool, throne, etc have come to symbolize political power. In the same way, to ascend the throne, or to seat on the throne, are common expressions for occupying political power. The person who seats on the throne is the one recognized as de jure ruler. In a colorful legend of the Ashanti people of Ghana, the founder of the kingdom was described as having received the mandate to rule by the reception of a mystical throne which, helped by the conjuring powers of a powerful mystic, was made to fall from heaven.

This is the etymological and contextual meaning of sit-tightism. In common usage, it refers to the condition of extreme unwillingness to relinquish political power, even at the expiration of one's political mandate. As posited by Anozie (2009), political sit-tightism is Nigeria's contribution to the evolving vocabulary of dictatorship in the modern world.

Sit-tightism is the adaptation of the African political class to the changing currents of leadership systems. It is an attempt to maintain a fortuitous middle ground between the traditional monarchical structure in which majority of African political systems was structured, and the modern demands of democracy and popular participation. Being mostly democracies, (with the possible exception of Morocco and Swaziland which still practice monarchy), and having gained political independence from European colonial masters between the late fifties and early sixties, most countries of Africa witnessed two of the three waves of democratization (Huntington, 1991). The first wave occurred between 1826 and 1926, when most part of Africa was still under the effective grip of colonial masters. By the second wave (1945 to 1962) Africa had joined the league of democracies by virtue of the decolonization process. The continent equally moved with the global trend in the roll-back of democracy known as reverse democratization (1958 to 1973) during which many democracies reversed to dictatorships. According to Huntington's serialization, the third wave of democratization started in 1974, (with the overthrow of the military regime in Portugal) and spread across Southern Europe, Latin America, and Asia. By the early 90's, when Huntington's book was going to the press, Africa had joined the fray, with one country after another shacking off decades of military dictatorship.

Given the long period of experiencing various forms of military dictatorships during the reverse wave, and added to the novelty and consequent fragility of African democracies in comparison with Western states where the length of democracy was longer and more entrenched (having started to adopt democracy during the first wave), there arose a situation where leaders of African states were either unwilling to oversee the commencement of democratic transition in their respective states, or allowed the transition to different forms of pseudo-democracy in

which case group of leaders transformed from military dictators to civilian presidents, with the ultimate end of retaining power in the same person or group of persons. Focusing exclusively on West Africa, Dukor expresses this succinctly:

One interesting observable political phenomenon, if not a reality, in West African sun-region, was the issue of military head of State who came to power through coup d'état, only to pull off the uniform to succeed himself in a seeming democratic election. Self-succession was certainly a new, if not a blizzard, horizon in black man's political lexicon and frontier...The development itself was an interesting addition to an encyclopedia of political thoughts, having derived its origin from military dictatorships (Dukor, 2003: 236).

Thus began a process of populating Africa with sit-tight 'presidents.' Ekeocha notes:

History is replete with individuals whose love for power turned into horrifying nightmares for their societies. On the parade in Africa are the late Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Idi Amin Dada, Hussein Havre, late Saide Bane, Mengistu Haile Mariam, the late Samuel Doe, Jean Bedel Bokasa, Marurs Nsuema, Mathew Kerekou, the late Mobutu Sese Sekou, Gnassingbe Eyadema, and so on. Some of them, in an attempt to perpetuate their hold on power, employed various means ranging from electoral manipulation, voodoo, kidnapping and assassination of their opponents (Ekeocha, 2003: 21).

SIT-TIGHT SYNDROME IN AFRICA: AN EXPLANATION

Human behavior has been, to a commendable extent, made explicable as a chain of causes and effects, actions and reactions, stimulus and response mechanisms, under the controlled rigor of social and behavioral sciences. Within this intellectual background, this research would explore sit-tight syndrome in Africa in three dimensions---the philosophical dimension, the political dimension, and the socioeconomic dimension.

The Philosophical Dimension

Right through the ages, philosophy has grappled with the fundamental question of how a society should be organized, and what should be the basis for any choice as to what best form of organization would prevail (Frost, 1989). Deriving from this broad compass are issues of who are most qualified to exercise rulership; what qualities or attitudes are most desirable in rulers; what are the best forms of relationship between the rulers and the ruled, or between the citizens and the state? These questions have occupied the minds of political philosophical thoughts from Plato to Aristotle, Augustine, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, etc.

A fundamental point of interest as well as point of departure in the ideas of these philosophers is the concept of power. Wolfe, cited in Lawhead (2003) defines power as the ability to compel compliance by threat or use of force. It is different from authority, which is the right to command and, correlatively, the right to be obeyed.

Liberal philosophers and political scientists do not define power differently. Max Weber, the German sociologist, underscores power as "the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behavior of others." John Kenneth Galbraith in his anatomy of power elaborated Weber's thesis by adding that "the related purpose, the greater the power exercised by the controlling authority." Henry Kissinger, the former American Secretary of State, argues that "power is an

aphrodisiac, a sort of scintillating elixir, both to the person in power and his admirers." Kissinger's contemporaries, known as the structural-realists, like Hans Morgenthau, Kennan and Niebhur argue that: "the quest for power is driven by human desire for domination" (Ekeocha, 2003).

In spite of the differing interpretations, and sometimes mutually antagonistic positions taken by these scholars over the concept of power, they all understand that power is a very dicey and intractable force when being used, and often proves to be a true test of the maturity of rulers, as well as the maturity and freedom of followers. This insatiable lust for power is the reason why African politicians have adapted the instruments of government to their personal satisfaction and dynastic perpetuation.

The idea of what amount of power should be lodged in any one man and, correspondingly, the rules governing a determination of tenure and method of transfer of political power, was first given expression by Plato. In his classical work, the *Republic*, and much later, the *Laws*, Plato theorized that the ideal society is organized in three gradations of unequal power and importance. At the lowest level of this organization is the stratum of workers. These are the uneducated, gullible, and unsophisticated majority whose labor is the source of the material satisfaction of the society. These are followed by the soldiers or auxiliaries who occupy the middle or second stratum. As indicated by their status, these are the guardians of the physical life of the society, upon whose bravery and self-sacrificing exertions the freedom of the society lay. At the top of this social hierarchy are the rulers, a class of philosopher-kings whose wisdom and sagacity is the bedrock of the survival and continuity of the state (Frost, 1989; Lawhead, 2003). Plato went on to propose a system of education which ensured the maintenance of society through the preservation of this natural scheme of things (Anozie and Ekeada, 2019).

It was not surprising, therefore, that Plato preferred monarchy over democracy, though he later argued in the *Laws*, that all citizens should have a voice in government, though provisioning the slaves for all works in the state (Frost, 1989: 182). This Theory of the state is fundamentally aristocratic, mirroring Plato's privileged background as the scion of an aristocratic stock. Even given the socialistic social structure which his theory of the state implied, in which all wealth should be devoted to use by and for all under the string guiding hand of the state, there are echoes of political absolutism which negate fundamental democratic ethos (Frost, 1989: 183), but rather support the concentration of political power in the hand of a few.

Somewhat disagreeing with Plato, Aristotle was less inclined towards democracy and constitutional arrangement of power. "Aristotle held that a monarchy, an aristocracy and a "polity" in which the members care equal, are the best forms of the state. On the other hand, he condemned as bad a tyranny, an oligarchy and a democracy. Aristotle believed that slavery was a just practice in a good state, since it was for him, a natural institution. However, he would admit only foreigners to the state class" (Frost, 1989: 184).

The Economic Dimension

A materialist interpretations of society and all of history, is no longer the exclusive preserve of Marxism. Contemporary social science and philosophy, in keeping with a prevailing multidisciplinary approach to social studies, have started to point to the fact that Africa's socioeconomic and political problems have economic dimensions as well. In other words, Africa suffers from a vicious cycle of poverty, inequality and unemployment, which have conspired to retard the growth of the region, and make it vulnerable to bad governance and outright dictatorship (*Ochichi Nchigbu*).

One could then understand why majority of the conflicts in Africa were either ignited or fuelled by the struggle of rival individuals or groups for resource control, for a fairer distribution of income, or for alleviation of the worst forms of poverty in the continent. In almost all the conflicts that have erupted in Africa, one could see the infamous hand of the struggle for control of oil, gold, diamond, copper, water, and uranium, and so on, or the struggle for control of political power, which would guarantee these results.

To groom Africa's economy towards poverty reduction, income inequality and increased employment, there is need to change the pattern of development from emphasis on national planning and building of gigantic infrastructure, to the provision of more enabling environment for free trade. Osadolor (2001) correctly argues that a major reason why colonial and post colonial Benin did not produce a class of wealth-owning and free-thinking indigenes able to fully grasp the opportunities for education, trade and politics as much as their Igbo neighbors to the East, was as a result of strict control of trade with outsiders and foreigners, by the Oba and his chiefs. Free and equal ownership and participation in the economy by all citizens, as the argument goes, reduces income inequality, provides employment opportunities, and ensures, if not effectively guarantees, democracy and good governance.

In light of the above, the existence of great income inequality and unequal access to public resources by all has grave implications for the nurturance of democracy and good governance in Africa. This problem is more acute in resource rich countries of Africa, particularly those whose economies thrive predominantly on oil. The connection between oil wealth, the concentration of political power in few hands, and repressive governance, has been successfully made in Anozie (2009). Citing Okonkwo, he held:

The most important feature of the oil sector, is its virtual independence from the rest of the economy. The output of the sector depends on very little contributions from the domestic means of production, and in particular, its share of the total labour force is very negligible. Hence the revenues are surely in the nature of surplus or collective economic rent. By contrast, oil revenue makes a large share of the national revenue, and virtually the whole of foreign exchange receipt.

On the basis of this remarkable thesis, Anozie (2009) went on to argue that oil wealth is great inducement to perpetuation of political power among leaders, noting that oil state leaders tend to have one of the longest tenure in office. This as will later be argued by Ekeocha (2003) bred political sight-tightism (which) "is a Nigerian contribution to the evolving vocabulary of dictatorship in the modern world" (Anozie, 2009:200) .

He further observed that Gabon's Omar Bingo (1968), Libya's Maomar Ghadaffi (1969 till date), Nigeria's military dictatorship (29 and half years), Egypt's Hosni Mubarak (1981 till date), the Republic of Conho's James Sassou Ngueso (1987 till date), Equatorial Guinea's Ngyema (1979 till date), Iraq's Saddam Hussein (1968-2003), and Indonesian's Suharto (1965-1998) are some of the leading names that testify to the reputation oil has as a political elixir.

The Political Dimension

This segment of the on-going analysis explores the factors that either cause or contribute to the so-called sit-tight syndrome, which stem from the structure of and relations of power between the citizens and the rulers, and among citizens themselves.

The emerging post-colonial African states have unwittingly reinforced the political values inherited from the colonial state apparatus. The gulf between the Nigeria ruling elite and minorities...is a result of power structures devoid of legitimacy or popular engagement. The genocide and ethnocide committed by Nigeria State support the suggestion that their forced annexation policies are designed to complete an unfinished colonial legacy (Mohammed-Salih, 2001: 191).

The first significant factor at work in conditioning leaders of African countries towards reluctance for predictable political transition is a conscious and unconscious carry-over of the mentality of colonialism. Political scientists, anthropologists and sociologists have suggested that colonialism is monstrous development of capitalism and imperialism. To this end, it (that is capitalism) requires the mobilization of tools of exploitation and subjection, to realize. One notable instrument of colonialism, used by the British in most of their colonies, is the divide-and-rule tactic. Divide and rule, as the name suggests, first sets the actors and entities that constitute an effective opposition to the rulers against each other, and then conquers and emasculates them one after the other. Having made them powerless and inactive, an unquestioned and unquestionable period of reign is then guaranteed.

Thus those actions and leadership tendencies that support sit-tightism are the descendants of the British policy of Indirect Rule. Colonial administration was undemocratic, repressive, exploitative and non-transparent. The administrators were not accountable to the locals, nor was there a durable framework for transfer of power. In fact, the concept of peaceful and democratic transfer of power was alien to colonialism. That is why, having been thoroughly enmeshed in the infamous school of colonialism, the indigenous politicians who took over from the foreigners could not help imbibing the values and mentalities of their erstwhile masters. It is an indubitable fact that "the goal of the African elite struggle against colonialism was not to transform but to inherit the colonial state, (and this) is evident in its persistent authoritarianism and disrespect for human and civil rights in the colonial and post-colonial states alike" (Mohammed -Salih, 2001:24).

Extending the logic to a General assessment of colonialism, Ezeanyika (2000) submits:

Perhaps the failure of the British policy of Indirect Rule (more correctly, colonial rule) is best demonstrated by the continued failures of those trained under it. The very fact that the British trained the majority of those Africans to whom they handed over government at the end of colonial rule in Africa greatly mirrors their administrative capabilities. The continued exploitation of the masses by the elite classes, orchestrated through subtle autocratic policies...Ezeanyoka, 2000: 75).

Another factor in the unique structure of the political system in Africa which has given occasion for the tendency towards power perpetuation through tenure elongation, is the uncommon way through which the political party system evolved and developed in most of Africa. Essentially, while political parties in the West originated in parliamentary groups and electoral committees,

clubs and long-established ideological debating societies and religious movements, in Africa, only a few individuals or groups of educated elite established political parties (Mohammed-Salih, 2003:5). This scholar further argues that "whereas the emergence of Western parties was contingent on the emergence of parliamentary institutions, the result of suffrage, ideological movements, union, church as well as civil society and social movements, African political parties were in some instances created instantaneously by a small group of political elite to contest elections in preparation for independence" (Mohammed-Saleh, 2003: 5). Moreover, because they failed to live up to the expectation of Western-style democracy, post-independent political parties gradually drifted towards traditional political structures, relying on chiefs to promote their election chances (Mohammed-Salih, 2003: 5-6).

This development was made possible because of the settlement pattern of African societies. African societies were arranged in ethnic enclaves. For this reason, "the political constituencies were geographical in nature and ethnically homogeneous. Therefore, to win the support of an ethnic group was to win a political constituency. Since in Nigeria, the ethnic group homelands were quite large geographically and demographically, a strong political base was guaranteed (Nnoli, 1978: 151).

African states thus became battlegrounds where ethnic groups of varying sizes and strengths contended for political power and economic dominance. Nnoli again states:

Under the conditions of congruence between the interests of the political parties and ethnic associations, increased political active led to the politicization of ethnicity. The struggle for political power became interpreted in ethnic terms. It became a struggle for the hegemony of the various regional factions of the petit bourgeoisie, first in the regional enclave, and then in the country as a whole (Nnoli, 1978:152-153).

It is therefore correct to conclude that "while decolonization has contributed to the emergence of a short-lived African nationalism, independence, on the contrary, contributed to the resurrection of ethnicity" (Mohammed -Salih, 2001: 25). Using their ethnic bases as bulwarks around political power, African politicians easily resort to sit-tightism, afraid that the precarious hold that their ethnic groups have on power, as well as the privileges and perquisites that come therewith, will be lost if politician's from rival ethnic groups, are ever allowed have access to the corridors of power.

Another unpopular but widely used strategy used by African politicians for political perpetuation of one man or a few groups of men in power, is the one-party system. At a time in Africa, especially between the early 70's and early 90's only a few African states had not experimented with the one-party system at one time or the other. Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda, were common examples.

The one-party system was a drug which exacerbated the very disease it was taken to heal. This is for the fact that though the "men behind the one-party regimes in Africa argued that the system was beneficial in order to control regional or ethnic divisions and curtail factionalism," arguing that the "one-party system reflected the basic consensus of African society" (Mbah, 2007: 365), the system became, in effect another veritable tool in the hand of the rulers for pushing back the advance of democracy and entrenching dictatorship.

Sit-tightism has found some kind of theoretical justification in the elitist theory of the state, variously expressed by Pareto, Mosca, and popularized in Mitchels' the iron law of oligarchy.

One of the most widely influential proponents of the first concept was C. Wright Mills. According to his views expressed in *The Power Elite* and other works, society is organized around institutional power structures, the three most important of which are the economic, military and political communities. Each power structure is manned by a top hierarchy, or elite: corporate presidents and board chairmen, the chiefs of staff of the armed services, and the highest elected or appointed officials in the government, such as the prime minister or the president and his cabinet (Rodee, Christol, Anderson & Greene, 1983: 166-167).

CONCLUSION

As shown in the analysis above, both politicians in democracies and those in *Ochichi Nchigbu* (dictatorships) have one thing in common: the keenness to gravitate towards power, to manipulate it, and even grovel before it. It was in light of this universal appeal of power that Kissinger saw "power (as) an aphrodisiac, a sort of scintillating elixir, both to the person in power and his admirers."

All societies therefore agree on the meaning and importance of power. Again, in all societies, it is understood that politics is the game for manipulating and utilizing power, for various ends. In this connection, David Eaton sees politics as the authoritative allocation of values, while Harold Lasswell defines politics as the arena for determining who gets what, when and how (Appadorai, 1979). There is, however, a particular area of disagreement: while democracies produce leaders that understand power as a means to an end--the end being the uplift of the living condition of citizens alive and those unborn--dictators have a tendency for seeking power as an end in itself.

Dictatorships, especially those that resort to political perpetuation, often argue that the challenges of nation-building, economic development and national security warrant the need to erode popular freedoms. They argue that what holds true for advanced democracies do not necessarily hold true for developing countries (Anyaku, 2005), given the acute struggle of these countries to catch up with the rest of the world in development and wealth. On the other hand, advanced capitalist democracies argue that freedom is a basic and universal human right, which does not require temporal and spatial convenience to be granted to people. They often cite the document on the American Declaration of Independence, in which the provision of freedom, equality and happiness, is deemed as the most fundamental duty of government (Jefferson, in Lawhead, 2003).

This paper has shown the extent to which the factors that determine the freedom and democratic values of a society are dependent on a complex web of socioeconomic, cultural and political forces. That, in effect, implies that if one wants to change a way a people is governed, by possibly expanding their freedoms and ensuring popular participation in decision-making, one needs to first change the material basis of the society.

There is need to find a middle ground between these extremes, to discover the golden mean between the unrestricted political involvement and socioeconomic freedom enjoyed in advanced democracies, and the total sacrifice of the freedom of the people at the altar of national stability and more often than not, one man's interest.

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